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THOMAS JONES PALMER, WESTERN PIONEER PUBLICIST

ABSTRACT

Daniel David Palmer's younger brother, Thomas Jones (T.J.) Palmer, became a legend in his own right, apart from the shadow of D.D. Born in Canada, he made a name for himself as a frontier publicist in the truest sense as he founded eight newspapers during the great wave of westward expansion following the Civil War. It would be in Indian Territory, now Oklahoma before statehood, where T.J. made his lasting mark. A Republican political activist, he was acknowledged by President Theodore Roosevelt for his "honesty and independence" that caused his name to be one of three proffered to the President for consideration as a replacement territorial governor, but at the last minute his name was dropped. This is an overview into their lives, having a Oklahoma connection.

INTRODUCTION

Thomas Jones Palmer (T.J.) was born to Catherine

McVay Palmer, wife of Thomas Palmer, in the Pickering village, Whitby township, just east of Toronto, Ontario, Canada in 1847 (1). Their firstborn was Daniel David, born March 6, 1845; Thomas (T.J.) next on February 6, 1847; Lucinda Mariah in 1849; Hannah Jane in 1851; Bartlett D in 1854 and Catherine in 1857, all in Pickering village. T.J.'s grandfather, Steven Palmer, married Abigail Jones (2), thus T.J.'s middle name. This Palmer family would move to Port Perry prior to the August 1861 enumerated census for the Reach township, of which Port Perry was a part (1).

Early Education

Brown's corner in the Pickering village had a log schoolhouse where John Black taught the youngsters of the village; his father, William Black, also was a teacher in this school district. According to T.J.'s early diaries used in writing his biography (3), T.J. recites that "Daniel and I had simi-

lar personalities, both of us were precocious and, under the prodding of John Black became avid readers. We were educated in subjects equivalent of eighth grade school work at the young ages of 11 and 9 years, then were given high school subjects to read, including the physical sciences." Here, Daniel became interested in bones, collecting all kinds of animal bones from the nearby fields (4).

Their American Experiences

We next find our Palmer family, Thomas, Catherine and children, in Louisa county Iowa, just southwest of Davenport in 1865. Thomas's business in Canada had failed; thus, the move to a more prosperous area. Daniel was 20, T.J. 18 and within six months they would become school teachers here (5). T.J. at only 18 years of age, caused the school board to question his education level, so they requested he be tested, the results to determine what level of teaching certificate he would receive. On getting the test results, the board was amazed; they expected him to qualify for a third-class certificate; instead, he qualified for a first-class certificate. Before his classes began, one board member was still in doubt so he invited T.J. to his home to further query him. To this

board member's surprise, he found T.J. exceedingly credible. He then advanced T.J. \$10 of his first salary to purchase new clothes for teaching. His bare knees where showing through his shredded trousers, his elbows through the coat cloth showing the lining. T.J. would then go on to impress the educational community in the Goose Creek school district by his outstanding teaching techniques, especially in spelling. The young people were impressed by him, almost as a peer-teacher. He taught in Iowa with Daniel for six years, then both transferred over to Mercer County, Illinois, across the Mississippi River, where T.J. would teach six more years, the last three as president of the Mercer County Teachers Association (2). Daniel would drop out of teaching in 1870 to become a fruit tree farmer in Eliza Township, Mercer county (5).

Their Marriages

Daniel married Abba Lord in the Eliza Township, Mercer County on January 1, 1871 (6), while T.J. returned to Myrtle Village, Pickering, Ontario, Canada to see the lady of his heart, whom he likely knew when he lived nearby. In the enumerated census late April 1871 for

Myrtle Village, T.J. is listed as a carpenter living with the James B. and Hannah Lazier family and their five children. On April 4, 1871, T.J., now 24, married Sarah Lazier, 18 (1). Not long after, T.J. and Sarah traveled to Mercer County, Illinois where he continued teaching. While teaching in Illinois, T.J. espoused his plan for teaching spelling in an advanced manner to his students, who caught on quickly. His students won each spelling-bee they entered. This so impressed President Edwards of the Illinois State University that he published a book using T.J.'s techniques, now known as *Edward's Analytical Speller* (2). T.J. last taught in western Iowa, Hardin County, where he read an article in a local newspaper on the financial crisis sweeping America. T.J. wrote a response to the editor, who refused to print it in *Letter's to the Editor*, which infuriated T.J. At semester's end, he resigned from teaching (2).

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T.J. The Publicist

After resigning in 1878, he went to Greenfield, down in Adair County, southwest of Des Moines, Iowa. Here, with 60 cents in his pocket, he convinced the Illinois Type Foundry of Chicago to send him a complete printing press at the cost of \$1,400. Securing the services of a

printer to set up the press, T.J. was now the editor of the *Greenfield Patriot* newspaper, where he freely espoused the principles of the Greenback Party of America. In 1879, he sold the paper, made a profit and returned to Muscatine, Iowa, where he established the *Muscatine Patriot* (2). His parents, brother Bart and wife all moved from Muscatine to What Cheer in Washington Township, Keokuk County, Iowa, a booming coal mining town. Here, each family member did their thing: father

3 Securing the services of a printer to set up the press, T.J. was now the editor of the *Greenfield Patriot* newspaper, where he freely espoused the principles of the Greenback Party of America.

Thomas set up as a boot-shoe maker; Bart as a stable tender and T.J. established the *What Cheer Patriot*. Daniel, missing his family, moved from Eliza Township, Mercer County, Illinois, to join them in What Cheer. His first wife, Abba, had left him, and shortly later he then married Louvenia Landers, a Civil War widow with an 8 year old son, on October 7, 1874 in Eliza (5). Daniel began in What Cheer as a fishmonger selling iced fish from a wheelbarrow street by street; later he would

own a grocery store, one of nine in town (7).

In 1886, T.J. took his family to Mason City, Iowa, where he established the *Cerro Gordo Republican* and the *Express Republican* newspapers (3). When the Republican party embraced the principles of the Greenback party, T.J. joined the Republicans, where he would have voice and agreement on several key issues: the reminting of silver coins, reissuing of greenback paper money and the adoption of prohibition. The latter was close to T.J.'s religious convictions as an Adventist. T.J. now felt at home socially and would remain a staunch Republican defender for the rest of his life (2).

From Mason City, Iowa, T.J. took his family to southwest Kansas to the town of Meade in Meade County, just south of Dodge City, which was a new western boom area in 1887. Here, T.J. established his *Meade Republican*, one of seven newspapers there (8).

"Meade County is the rock upon which the hopes and dreams of many a newspaperman were shattered. First it was a boom county, then a bust, paper and ink were so scarce, printed editions in the newspapers were sporadic. Here, for some

reason not known today, his (T.J.'s) friends and adversaries referred to him as 'Toe Jam Palmer.' T.J. lasted here until 1893" (9).

At this time, T.J.'s Mae was 20, studying in college to be a physician, Clyde was 18 and Cora 11. Financial matters for the Palmer's went from bad to worse so T.J. moved his family to Hutchinson, Kansas, where he started the *Daily Patriot* and Mae reentered college to continue her studies. T.J. now



Figure 1. T.J. Palmer

took a strong interest in politics as he went to Topeka, to the state capitol as a newspaperman covering the legislative and political affairs of Kansas (2). In the newspaper room of the capitol there were portraits hung on one wall of the 19 newspapermen, T.J. was number 15. (See Figure 1) (10).

The Cherokee Land Run of 1893

In this part of the West in 1893, excitement swept America as the Cherokee Land Run for free homestead land in Indian Territory would begin on September 16. This was land in the north-central to west portion of Indian Territory, where over 100,000 people arrived on foot, by horseback, carriage, wagon and train. At high noon, the U.S. Army fired several cannons and bedlam began (11). T.J. departed Hutchinson by train to end at Enid, Indian Territory where there was a traffic jam of people trying to file their claims, others trying to find out where to go to search for land. T.J. managed to hire a horse-carriage and traveled to a spot he was interested in just northeast of Enid, to a place that would become Medford. Here he found the Rock Island-Santa Fe railroad tracks, a very small shack called the Depot and a small 12 x 14 foot store selling a few provisions. T.J. purchased two lots on the east side of the tracks, as this is where he was told the business area would be. He chose Medford since he believed in this small town where he could have an influence in its growth and development. He took the next train north back to Hutchinson to pack his



Figure 2. Medford Patriot

presses, personal belongings and return to Medford in a freight car with his family. The die was cast; Medford was to be the new Palmer home (Figure 2) (3).

On September 30, he returned to Medford; the freight car had to be placed on an off-line track until he could build a wooden building for the presses and living quarters on the floor above. On October 14, the town officers decided the business district would be better on the west side of the tracks, so T.J. the carpenter had to dismantle what he had built and reassemble on two other lots he purchased on the other side of the tracks. On October 20, he moved out of the freight car after five weeks into the new building on south Main Street. Now

the race was on to print his first edition, which came off the presses October 26th. On the 23rd, the town officials deciding to incorporate the town of Medford, T.J. was elected in a street meeting as the new town Inspector or Judge. On November 2nd, his second edition came off the presses and continued weekly thereafter. Clyde began apprenticing with T.J. to become a printer. He stayed with his dad, running the *Patriot* until T.J. sold the newspaper March 8, 1909. Clyde would then move to La Grande, Oregon, and set up as a printer-publicist. Shortly, two other newspapers came to Medford in 1893, reducing T.J.'s business (3).

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T.J. Palmer The Elected One, Etc

In Cross's biographical notes he succinctly extrapolates from T.J. diaries, onto his pages 456-486, the following, which is capsulized even further here (3):

"November 7, meeting held in the Patriot offices to form a Commercial Club, T.J. was elected the first president... November 20, a Republican convention was held in nearby Pond Creek (south of Medford) to elect delegates to a Territorial State Convention, yet to be, T.J. was elected president of this convention..."

On the 27th, a Statehood Convention was held in Kingfisher (south a Enid) where on the 28th, T.J. was elected Secretary of this convention. . . On the 30th, T.J. took out a Commission as the first Notary Public in County "L", as it was called then . . . January 1, 1894, Mae married George Everett Woodruff of Hutchinson, Kansas, shattering T.J.'s dream of Mae becoming a physician, her wedding story was front page of the Patriot on the 4th . . . February 16, T.J. intercedes in having only one school district for Medford instead of dividing the town, thus making it easier to acquire rail road taxes for one school district, #54 . . . March 10, Medford was incorporated by election, T.J. was elected President of the new school board where he would serve for five years. When he turned the books for the district over to his successor, every penny was accounted for . . . August 29, a convention was held in Pond Creek to elect County Commissioners, T.J. was elected president of this convention . . . October 6, a Republican Convention was held in the Territory to nominate a Representative to the Territorial Government in Guthrie, south of Medford. T.J. was elected president of this convention, then unanimously nominated to be the Representative. Territorial

Governor Renfrew told T.J., his district had been laid out to be a Populist County for all those coming down from Kansas . . . November 6, T.J. was defeated by 14 votes, these were fellow Republican whiskey voters who defeated him for the Territorial Legislature . . . 19 December 1897, T.J. appointed Postmaster of Medford, where he served nine years . . . 21 February 1899, T.J. appointed U.S. Commissioner, facilitating land claims filing now for Grant County, in lieu of having to take their claims down to Enid . . . September 1900, Cora began her college education at Bethany College, Lindsborg, Kansas where her prime study was in voice . . . 14 October 1901, construction began on the Palmer Opera House, made of brick walls 50 x 100 foot with 20 foot high walls and a 21 foot ceiling . . . 28 December 1901 the Bethany College Quartet came to Medford and performed in the Opera House, Cora sang several solo's. May 1903, Cora graduated from Bethany and wanted to go to Berlin, Germany to study voice for two years; her parents so provided . . . 29 May 1906, 'My older brother Daniel and his 5th wife, Mary came to Medford from Davenport and setup in a rooming house. Next morn -



Figure 3. The old Palmer store

ing I saw them on the street they came to my home for dinner. They were on their way to the Pacific Coast. Recently he discovered what he calls Chiropractic, a system of removing disease by adjusting vertebra in the spinal column, which, becoming displaced by falls or strain impinge the nerves and prevent their distribution of the life-giving vitality. He has a far developed it into a science, which will make his name immortal. D.D. soon went into the grocery business in town, located in this store' (12) [See Figure 3]. . . 'D.D. and wife and Sarah and I went to Oklahoma City for the day. We called upon Dennis T. Flynn (an old friend of T.J.'s), I introduced D.D. as Dr. Palmer, which caused Flynn to inquire into his school of practice, as his wife was in poor health. Flynn had taken her to the finest physicians in New York City, they did her no good, he even took her to Europe, and after a surgery she was no better.' . . . June 4th, Mrs. Flynn came to Medford, stayed at the Commercial Hotel with her

two sons, and D.D. adjusted her. After three days, she felt much better, she could sleep without having to take her opiate medication, she could walk several blocks now and not be dizzy. 'Flynn told T.J. later, his wife no longer has dizzy spells, they are both amazed.' June 10th, Sarah and I took dinner with the Flynn's at the Hotel, then Flynn departed for Washington, D.C., he was the Congressional Representative from the Oklahoma Territorial Government... 18 January 1907, Hannah Lazier, Sarah's mother died while visiting and was buried in the left side of the Palmer plot, Rosemound cemetery, east of Medford. (1998 search of the Patriot came up empty for Hannah's Obituary article)... 9 December 1903, T.J. writes his father (Thomas) died this day... 3 March 1908, T.J. loans D.D., \$300 to go to Oklahoma City, after D.D. sold his grocery store and was going to establish a practice and possibly a school there... June 1, T.J. met Dennis Flynn at the Medford depot, where T.J. was informed, President Teddy Roosevelt had decided to remove Territorial Governor Jenkins, a Democrat, who was foul up on Statehood procedures. Flynn was asked for three possible names as replacements for Governor. He recommended Tom Ferguson, Harry Gilstrap and

T.J. Palmer. As Flynn was leaving the President to contact one of these, the President remarked, 'I've eliminated Gilstrap, I like what you say about the honesty and independence of Palmer, but Ferguson was chairman of the Territorial Republican Committee, so contact Ferguson.' So near, yet so far from great honors for T.J. In March 1909, T.J. sells the Patriot... Cora would marry and live nearby in Wakita, Grant County."

T.J. died November 7, 1916 at 69 years, 9 months and a day (13). His page-one obituary appears in the *Patriot* on the 9th, with banner headlines, "Stores Close As Tribute To T.J. Palmer." He was buried in the Palmer plot on the right side, leaving room in the middle for Sarah. Beneath his name on his headstone it reads; **He Believed He Was Right** (see Figure 4) (15). Even Sarah, who had this put on his headstone, felt the compulsion of T.J., to always be



Figure 4. T.J.'s grave stone

recognized beyond his peers. Sarah died September 19, 1926 in Wellington, Kansas, in a hospital after being in her daughter's home with a lingering illness. Her obituary was page 1 of the *Patriot* for September 23rd. Local ladies of Medford were in the group at grave-side for services at Rosemound cemetery (16). Jack Cross, T.J.'s biographer, tells us further: "Palmer was a honest man, rare of principle, frank and open, and he loved to call a person's bluff, never hesitated to announce his stand on any issue. He preferred the small puddle to the lake, always crusading for what he believed in was right (3)."

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Thus ended the life and career of one of the West's busiest publicists, who was always eager to serve his community while also eager to have the spot light on his service. Must have been a Palmer trait.

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13. Death Certificate Thomas J. Palmer, courtesy Oklahoma Health Dept., Vital Statistics #C-7955
14. Obituary article, Medford Patriot, page 1, November 9, 1916. Courtesy Oklahoma State Historical Society, Newspaper Archives, Oklahoma City, OK.
15. Author's photo of Palmer plot, Rosemound Cemetery, Medford, OK
16. Obituary article Medford Patriot, page 1, September 23, 1926.

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Thomas Palmer & sons photo circa 1890 (next page):
Standing (L to R) - Thomas Jones Palmer (son), Bartlett D. Palmer (son)
Seated (L to R) - Daniel David Palmer (son), Thomas Palmer (father)

